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ABSTRACT

Seeking an understanding of rural communities in order to gain insights into opportunities for improving rural schools, this 2-year project examined 14 case studies and presented implications for future use. Selected as exemplary of particular strategies and representative of diverse populations of rural America, the case studies were examined through: (1) a design session involving six professional consultants: (2) a review of existing reports, evaluations, and related documents, and (3) site visits which involved observations and interviews with key participants. Each strategy was identified as addressing variables within the educational system or as external to the educational system. The 14 rural school improvement strategies were analyzed in terms of the success of each community project, as determined by the durability of the program over time and its continuing contributions to its original objectives. Conclusions were that improvement efforts in rural schools must be based on the reality of rural circumstances, and must include problem defining, planning, and implementing at the local level, as well as incorporating assistance from professionals and agencies outside the community. (JD)

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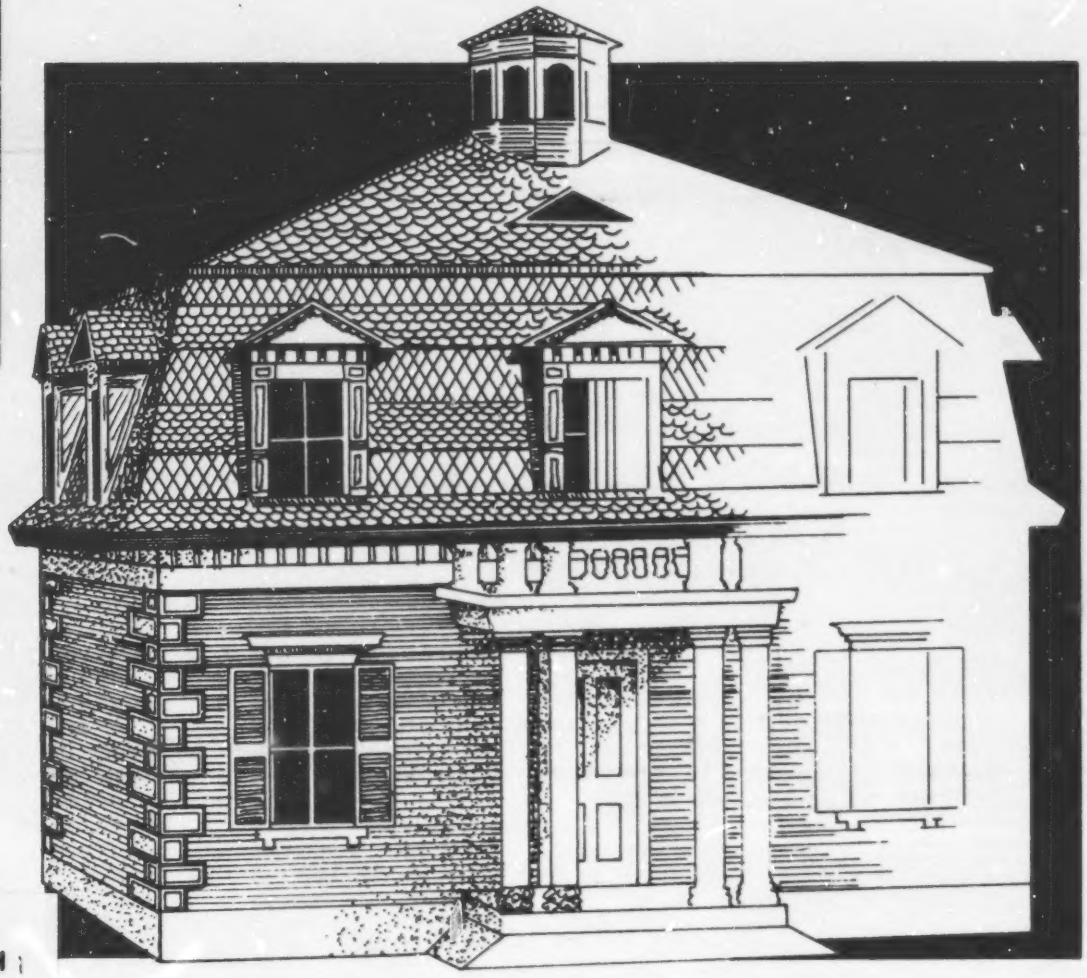

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IMPROVING RURAL SCHOOLS

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Acknowledgments

This document summarizes the findings of a 2-year study sponsored by the National Institute of Education's Program on Educational Policy and Organization. The study was truly a team effort. It involved a diverse and talented group of consultants consisting of Ralph Bohrson, a former rural teacher and recently responsible for rural school improvement programs as a program officer with The Ford Foundation; James Branscome, a freelance journalist, major spokesperson on issues of Appalachia, and student of community organizations; Daniel Cromer, formerly with a regional education service agency serving rural schools in northeast Georgia, and currently an assistant superintendent in Winder, Georgia; Faith Dunne, from the School of Education at Dartmouth College, a school board member in Hartland, Vermont, and a researcher and writer on rural education; Thomas Gjelten, former teacher on North Haven Island off the coast of Maine, and author of *Schooling in Isolated Communities;* and Milbrey McLaughlin, a researcher-policy analyst for the Rand Corporation.

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The real substance of the study came from site visits to observe 14 rural school improvement efforts, and I wish to acknowledge the fine cooperation we received and thank the many local program participants for their time and their openness in responding to our inquiry.

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Paul Nachtigal
Education Commission of the States
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1. Introduction

Rural education has not been high on the agenda of either educators or policymakers. The high visibility of urban education problems, together with the commonly held assumption that school consolidation would eventually eliminate most small rural school problems, has relegated rural education to a position of limited concern. This situation is now beginning to change. Employment opportunities related to energy development, the recreation boom, and growing dissatisfaction with urban living have contributed to a partial reversal of the rural to urban migration. Many rural communities and rural schools once in decline now face new growth.

While current information on rural education is limited, a few recent studies have questioned the assumed benefits of a longstanding policy of improving rural schools by making them larger, often removing them from the small communities whose people depend on them for much of their social life, as well as for the education of their children.[1,2]

The research described in this report was sponsored by the Program on Educational Policy and Organization of the National Institute of Education in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of rural America's schools and communities, the problems that confront them, and ways to improve their capacity to attack these problems. To help policymakers and practitioners become aware of both the difficulties and the potential of rural improvement strategies, the study examined a variety of past approaches and their interaction with the settings they were designed to affect. In each case, we examined the improvement effort in terms of the problems or needs it sought to address, the approach taken to address them, modifications required by obstacles or opportunities encountered, and conditions in the settings that thwarted or facilitated improvement projects. By examining each project's interaction with people in the rural setting, we sought to understand the organizational and social factors that determine a community's capacity to solve its own problems, and to learn something about what approaches to improving that capacity look most promising, in what kinds of communities, and for what reasons.

The programs selected for inclusion in the study represented a range of strategies, some of which attempted to improve rural education by addressing variables *within* the educational system, such as additional teacher training, improved access to resources, and the introduction of new curricula. Other approaches dealt with variables *outside* the system, such as increased community involvement, new leadership for rural communities, and the use of political action to stop school consolidation initiatives. Some of the programs studied were centrally designed and heavily funded, while others were small-scale and locally initiated. The sites identified for

study were selected because they were good, if not the best, examples of a particular strategy *and* because they were representative of the diverse populations that comprise rural America.

The procedure for conducting the study included: (1) a design session involving six consultants* in the development of guidelines for data collection; (2) a review of existing reports, evaluations, and related documents; and (3) site visits, which in most cases involved both the principal investigator and a consultant to observe programs and interview key participants.

Our agenda was twofold; we wanted to understand, as best we could, the nature of rural communities as we move into the decade of the 1980's, and, by looking at past rural education improvement efforts, to understand better the future opportunities for improving schools serving rural children.

This report summarizes the framework and assumptions of the study, provides brief descriptions of the programs and their outcomes, discusses the lessons learned from the case studies, and presents the implications of these lessons for future rural school improvement, public policy, and additional research.

The remainder of the report is presented in five sections: section 2 is a brief history of rural school reform; section 3 contains thumbnail descriptions of the 14 rural school improvement efforts included in the study. Sections 4 and 5 present our analysis of what we saw and learned about rural communities (section 4) and which efforts worked—and why—in those community settings (section 5). The final section suggests an agenda for improving rural schools based on an acceptance of rural reality.

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*Ralph Bohrson, a former rural teacher and recently responsible for rural school improvement programs as a program officer with The Ford Foundation; James Branscome, a freelance journalist, major spokesperson on issues of Appalachia, and student of community organizations; Daniel Cromer, formerly with a regional education service agency serving rural schools in northeast Georgia, and currently an assistant superintendent in Winder, Georgia; Faith Dunne, from the School of Education at Dartmouth College, a school board member in Hartland, Vermont, and a researcher and writer on rural education; Thomas Gjelten, former teacher on North Haven Island off the coast of Maine, and author of *Schooling in Isolated Communities*; and Milbrey McLaughlin, a researcher-policy analyst for the Rand Corporation.

2. Rural School Reform Efforts

Rural education in America has traditionally been looked upon as the poor country cousin of the public school system. By accepted standards, it has been poorly staffed and less well-financed; it has offered fewer educational opportunities; and it has turned out students less well-equipped to cope with an industrialized urban society. Historically, efforts to resolve these deficiencies fall into three rather distinct themes of rural school reform—themes based on different assumptions about the nature of the problem.

The first theme holds that the problem with rural education is that it is not urban, that *the rural school itself is the problem*. Reform efforts based on this assumption have attempted to mold rural education into a likeness of urban education. Even before the turn of the century—and paralleling the industrial development of the Nation—efforts were made to systematize rural schools. The best professional thinking was that even the smallest one-room school could be given a graded structure, with the stuff of learning broken down into discrete subject-matter courses. This approach attempted to remedy the problems of a haphazard educational process caused by excessive community control, one-room schools covering all age levels, and highly transient school mistresses or masters whose success was measured by whether or not they could manage the students.

In the 1890's, the National Education Association's Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools defined remedies for the rural school problem, many of which are still being applied today: "...consolidation of schools and transportation of pupils, expert supervision by county superintendents, taking the schools out of politics, professionally-trained teachers—the rural school would teach country children sound values and vocational skills; the result was to be a standardized, modernized 'community' in which leadership came from the professionals."[3]

The second theme of rural school reform—the concept of *the "necessarily existent" small school*—did not emerge until the mid-1950's. Although basically agreeing with the "one-best-system" philosophy of the first theme, the second theme also recognized that some schools would have to remain small because of the terrain and sparsity of population in many areas. This concept was given some degree of legitimacy by a series of grants from the Fund for the Advancement of Education of The Ford Foundation. The Rocky Mountain Area Project (RMAP) for small high schools in Colorado, which implemented such strategies as multiple-class teaching, small group techniques, the use of film courses in physics and chemistry, and gifted student seminars, was a companion to a vigorous, statewide school consolidation plan. The Rural School Improvement Program of Berea College in Kentucky retrained teachers to work in the state's back hills, where consolidation was not an option. The Alaska Rural School

Project provided a bootcamp survival-indoctrination course for future "bush" teachers, most of whom were newly arrived from the "lower 48."

This era of small school improvement efforts was capped by the Western States Small Schools Project, a five-state program funded by The Ford Foundation that carried on some of the strategies of RMAP and explored many others, including the installation of new curricula, computer-based modular scheduling, telephone teaching, nongraded school organization, and bilingual and career exploration education. For the most part, personnel changes, the disappearance of project support systems, and the continual pressures for returning to the status quo have erased almost all vestiges of these practices.

Dr. Frank Cyr of Columbia Teachers College and the Catskill Area Project for Small School Design took this theme one step further, arguing that not only were small schools necessary, they were even desirable. Cyr used an automobile-train analogy to contrast the potential flexibility and responsiveness of small schools with the rigidity and efficiency of large systems. He proposed that small schools, if properly organized, could take advantage of the inherent strengths of smallness and offer a quality of education that even urban schools might wish to emulate.

The train, Cyr wrote, is a series of specialized units (locomotive, baggage car, day coaches, parlor car) loosely coupled together—the best design so far for moving large numbers of people from specified points in one large city to another. A big school is also a series of specialized units, in which elementary students are segregated by age, and secondary students by specialized subjects. The automobile, on the other hand, is a single vehicle, and although it can move only a limited number of persons, it can move them from virtually any location to any other location and at any time. The small school should be as utilitarian as the automobile, designed to serve the varied needs and interests of small groups of students. While Cyr's proposals were not taken seriously by the policymakers of the 1950's, this "small is beautiful" philosophy now appears to be gaining some credibility.

The third theme of rural school reform emerged in the mid-1960's, with the advent of massive Federal intervention in education in the form of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This theme is based on an assumption that *the problems of education are generic*. Concerned that schools were not adequately serving poor minorities, policymakers defined problems in terms of advantaged and disadvantaged students. Since both types of students were found in all schools regardless of size, common program strategies and funding formulas were deemed to be applicable everywhere.

While the three themes emerged sequentially over time, the later theme has not totally replaced the earlier ones. Indeed, the consolidation thinking of the first theme, along with the generic assumptions of the third, dominates current rural education policy. Both of these themes are consistent with "one-best-system" thinking as presented in David Tyack's book of the same title,[4] which in turn is reinforced by the belief that all of America is moving toward a thoroughly urbanized society. The second theme did not develop the necessary currency among educational decisionmakers to continue.

Most of the 14 programs studied were based on generic assumptions about educational improvement. Only a few recent and generally locally initiated projects tended to reflect a more differentiated view of rural education.

Eight programs studied dealt with school improvement variables within the educational system, and the majority of these were clearly based on generic assumptions about school improvement. Three of these projects were based on the assumption that rural schools would be improved if teachers were better prepared: the North Dakota New School of Behavioral Studies in Education; the Mountain Towns Teacher Center in Wilmington, Vermont; and the Teacher Corps Program in Holmes County, Mississippi. The Holmes County project held to the model prescribed by the National Teacher Corps office, while the New School and Mountain Towns modified the delivery of teacher training, if not the content, to accommodate the problems of bringing inservice education to rural areas.

The Experimental Schools (ES) Program in South Umpqua, Oregon, the Texas Education Service Center (ESC) in San Angelo, Texas, and the National Diffusion Network (NDN)/State Facilitator Project in Maine all addressed the problems of rural school improvement more broadly—through curriculum development, access to outside resources, and staff development. Again, the basic assumptions about education were generic in nature. The guidelines for ES were identical for rural and urban systems. The Texas ESC's theme of "service available anywhere, available everywhere" and their funding structure place that organization in the mainstream of one-best-system thinking. Almost all of the NDN-approved programs have been developed in urban and suburban settings, and are deemed by program officials to be applicable anywhere. Elk River, Idaho, has been designated by that state as a "necessarily existent" small school for funding purposes. However, program requirements for state approval remain the same. Only in the Loblolly project in Gary, Texas, was the nature of the program such that the effort clearly reflected local conditions.

The remaining six programs dealt with school improvement variables outside the system. The designs for two of these were based on generic assumptions about education. The purpose of the Urban/Rural Program in Fort Gay, West Virginia, was to shift control from central administration/higher education to teachers and community. The project strategy came at least in part from the Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle for community control in New York City. Program designers reasoned that if it was a good strategy for poor minorities in urban areas, it was also a good strategy for poor minorities in rural areas. The Rural Futures Development (RFD) Program in San Juan County, Utah, which formed school/community groups for rational problem solving, is considered to be a neutral process applicable to schools of any size.

The Leadership Development Program, while drawing on some fairly universal notions of developing leadership (e.g., internships, travel, and independent study), recognized regional differences in rural areas and was organized accordingly. Those programs that most clearly departed from mainstream thinking, People United for Rural Education (PURE) in Iowa, and the community schools movements in Blackey, Kentucky, and Liberty, West Virginia, were clearly in opposition to the first theme, in their strong resistance to wholesale consolidation of

small schools. The Staples (Minnesota) School/Community Development effort, while tapping outside resources, was designed specifically to address a local set of circumstances.

As one moves across the 14 programs, there is some evidence that the generally accepted assumptions about rural schools being the problem and/or that schooling is a generic endeavor are being questioned. In a few communities, new thinking and new strategies are beginning to emerge.

3. A Montage of Strategies

This section presents thumbnail sketches of the 14 rural school improvement strategies in two general groupings: those programs dealing with school improvement variables within the educational system, and those programs dealing with variables that go beyond the system. In both cases, the sequence of projects moves from centrally designed, more heavily funded efforts to locally initiated, small-scale efforts.

Within-the-System Strategies

Going Open in North Dakota: The New School of Behavioral Studies in Education. A major recommendation of the 1965 Statewide Study Committee of the North Dakota State Legislature was that the 1,834 teachers in the state who did not hold a bachelor's degree (59 percent of the elementary teaching force, the majority of them rural) should be enticed to complete their college educations. Further, the report suggested that the training program designed for these teachers should be used as a means of changing the mode of instruction in North Dakota.

Inspired by the Joseph Featherstone articles on English informal education, which had just appeared in the *New Republic*, the committee declared that "...the desired new kind of elementary teacher—one who views, accepts, and skillfully pursues teaching as a clinical method" should be trained through an experimental program that emphasized individualized instruction, continuous progress, close faculty/student relationships, and a great deal of clinical practice.

The New School for Behavioral Studies, an ad hoc institution established at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks to achieve that goal, existed for 4 years (1968-1972). Its program was based on teacher exchange. A less-than-degreed teacher would take a year's leave of absence from the classroom to attend the New School. The teacher would be replaced by a master's degree candidate, who would serve as an intern in the local school for that year. Interns were prepared in an 8-week summer program and were supervised and supported in their field placements by regional "clinical professors" hired by the university. The less-than-degreed teachers spent a full 9-month academic year in the New School program. Both interns and less-than-degreed teachers were trained in "open classroom" philosophy and methods; both were specifically expected, as the Statewide Study Committee put it, "to develop and introduce the style of instruction that should be utilized—with appropriate modifications—in the elementary schools in the state."

The New School strategy had several components that, while falling short of total reform of elementary education in North Dakota, have contributed both to the study committee goal of fully certifying all elementary teachers and to establishing a climate for continuing teacher improvement in the state. First, the program was state-initiated and state-controlled, and it addressed a problem with which schools and communities across the state generally identified. Second, the program was designed to be decentralized, and the key actors in educational change were long-time local teachers, trusted in their communities; they were exposed to a new way of viewing teaching and learning, but were left free to interpret and implement the new practices as they felt suited their classrooms. Third, the New School developed under conditions that its director, Vito Perrone, claims are critical to educational reform: more than enough time and less than enough money. Finally, the director made a long-term commitment to school improvement in a rural state, a commitment he predicted would take 10 years; he is still working at the task 14 years later.

The Teacher Corps in Mississippi: Washington Strategy Against Delta Dilemmas. The Teacher Corps, originally education's version of a domestic Peace Corps, bringing dedicated activist teachers to the task of improving schools for poor minorities, has now evolved into an inservice education program to improve educational opportunities and the learning climate for children of low-income families. In Holmes County, Mississippi, Teacher Corps activity involved Mississippi Valley State University working with Goodman/Pickins Elementary School to develop a model program for personnel development consistent with the national priorities of multicultural education and the formulation of diagnostic and prescriptive methods of teaching.

The Goodman/Pickins Elementary School is an all-black rural school located halfway between the two communities that give it its name. It is the "best" of the Holmes County elementary schools, crowding 500 students into space for 300. Only 76 percent of its students qualify for title I funding, while the district average is 81 percent.

The impact of the 2-year intervention, which experienced a high degree of staff turnover, was mixed. The Teacher Corps:

- Paid for master's degrees for four interns, only one of whom is likely to stay in the system;
- Provided a free master's degree for two other Goodman/Pickins staff;
- Offered assorted graduate courses for another 30 to 50 teachers from both Goodman/Pickins and Lexington, the designated satellite school in the Teacher Corps proposal;
- Conducted workshops on a variety of topics, most of which were taken from professors' regular lectures;
- Initiated a tutorial program, which served both to give selected students badly needed assistance and to provide tutors with a bit of additional income;
- Began a community outreach program, which contributed much to reestablishing school/community ties that had been strained by desegregation struggles.

The teachers generally appreciated the assistance provided by the Teacher Corps through workshops. And for those needing additional credits, being able to take courses at home, rather than driving an hour and a half to the university, was a welcome change. But the course content was not always seen as helpful, and traditional research courses and workshops on teaching the talented and gifted would gladly have been traded for some practical help on teaching the basics to large numbers of students.

Thus, while personnel in rural schools welcome any assistance beyond the usual outreach of service agencies, the national goal of developing a model training program around multicultural and diagnostic/prescriptive teaching was not achieved, and for Holmes County, it might not even have been appropriate. As desirable as multicultural education might be, it has little relevance in an all-black school. And lowering a 40-to-1 student-teacher ratio would seem to be a prerequisite for implementing a more individualized diagnostic/prescriptive approach to teaching.

Natives and Newcomers: Vermont's Mountain Towns Teacher Center. In 1973, a teacher and the principal of Deerfield Valley Elementary School in Wilmington, Vermont, offered a course to area teachers called "The Open Classroom." To their surprise, the class—based on British open classroom techniques—was well-attended by teachers from neighboring schools in southern Vermont and northwest Massachusetts.

By the end of the course, it had become obvious to many participants that they had common problems and common concerns that stemmed from a mutual interest in the open classroom techniques but that were not restricted to that interest. All of them worked in the region, and all of them wanted to adapt new educational ideas to the exigencies of New England rural school life. From these common concerns emerged the concept of developing a cooperative, multidistrict teacher center, based on the British teacher centre model, to suit the New England administrative structure.

In 1974, title III money was available in the state, and a proposal was written asking for $25,000, supplemented by in-kind contributions, to establish the Mountain Towns Teacher Center (MTTC). The center promised everything from graduate courses to scrounged materials, from formal communications networks among teachers and schools to individual, nonevaluative classroom support efforts. Deerfield Valley Elementary School offered to house the new center, providing both meeting space and a place to put a professional library, on-loan curriculum materials and resources, catalogs of equipment and materials owned by each of the member schools, and the equipment needed to publish both a community resources directory and a regular newsletter.

Each of these elements was intended to meet a particular need of the typical southern Vermont teacher, a transplanted urbanite accustomed to constant interaction with other professionals. The center was intended to attract teachers during after-school hours to a place where they might find and create classroom materials, exchange ideas, and engage in discussions of educational philosophy.

The 5-year history of MTTC has been full of uncertainties, and its future existence is very much in doubt.* With the short-term nature of title III funding, a major problem continues to be securing financial support, a problem that is symptomatic of more basic issues. Because the center was established primarily as a support system for urban/suburban teachers who were relatively new to the area, it did not seek or attract the support of such important decision-makers as administrators and board members who could help ensure the financial security of MTTC.

Further, the "open education" philosophy that the center pursued was not widely accepted, being too closely identified with the "Vermont Design," a controversial open-classroom-oriented program that had been promoted in the late 1960's by Harvey Scribner, state commissioner of education. The broad-based, multiple-district support necessary for such a program did not materialize. Also, use of the center even by those supportive of the idea did not meet original expectations. Winter road conditions and fatigue from a day of teaching were not conducive to "dropping in" after school to participate in center activities. The operating procedures, therefore, had to be modified to take services to the classrooms, which placed unreasonable demands on a small staff with only limited funding.

As with independent teacher centers generally, a relatively small percentage of teachers found the services extremely useful and were, therefore, willing to commit time, energy, and financial resources to keep MTTC alive. Problems related both to service delivery to small rural schools and to securing broad-based financial support will need to be solved if centers like Mountain Towns are to succeed.

Experimental Schools Program, South Umpqua, Oregon. Experimental Schools was a reaction to the "piecemeal" change strategies of the 1960's, which were perceived to be ineffective. Many of the pieces of better education were at hand—new curricula, new staffing patterns, active community involvement, and new uses of time, space, and facilities. But nowhere had they been assembled in a holistic reform effort.

In the best traditions of applied research, ES, with full Federal funding for 5 years, was to make this happen. It was a competitive program. The first round of competition was held in 1971, but no rural site was selected because small schools could not compete successfully under the program guidelines. A separate competition in 1972 resulted in the funding of 10 rural sites, one of which was the South Umpqua School District in Western Oregon. South Umpqua did institute many changes, although they fell short of being comprehensive. (In spite of this, Abt Associates, Inc., which held a contract to evaluate all Experimental Schools, judged South Umpqua to one of the best of the rural sites.) New programs were instituted, some of which proved to be controversial; teachers were asked to implement decisions that they had no voice in making. As with other Federal programs, deadlines called for a rate of change foreign to rural communities. And while the Abt evaluation is correct in saying that, after 5 years, South Umpqua came the *closest* to achieving comprehensive change, the

*As of June 1980, all funding had run out, and the center was being closed down.

resulting fallout has convinced most of those involved that the price of ES was too high, even though it brought close to $1 million into the district.

A backlash of conservative forces has arisen, many of the ES programs have been discontinued, library books and curriculum materials are now scrutinized by a watchdog committee, a new board has been elected, the superintendent and associate superintendent have left, and the new administration has a mandate to get things back to normal. While some of this conservative trend results from the times and the inmigration of individuals holding those views, the swing of the pendulum is greater in South Umpqua because of ES.

Services Available Anywhere, Available Everywhere: Region XV Education Service Center, San Angelo, Texas. The Education Service Center Region XV, operating out of San Angelo, Texas, is one of 20 such centers established with $5 million of title III funds to serve both the urban and rural schools of the state. The centers were established in 1969 as "media centers."

The Region XV Center serves 48 mostly rural school systems, scattered over 25,000 square miles and enrolling only 41,000 students (fewer than two students per square mile). Region XV performs its media center function extremely well, providing twice-a-week delivery to member schools. Additionally, the Region XV Center now provides a wide range of services, including data processing, fiscal management, and budgeting; inservice education on new curriculum materials and teaching devices, as well as for state-mandated programs on crime prevention and drug education; direct services, including driver education simulators, and resources for teachers and aides to work with children of migrant farm workers; and assistance to schools in establishing cooperative programs for the handicapped.

The governing structure of the center is unique. It has a board of directors, representing the business and political interests of the area, who are appointed by a joint committee made up of member superintendents. The board of directors appoints the center's executive director with the approval of the state commissioner of education. The center is *not* directly responsible, then, to the local school board, the state board of education, or the legislature.

In spite of this independence (or perhaps because of it), the services and programs offered by the center are shaped by the sources of funding, which are primarily state and Federal agencies. The programs, therefore, reflect more of a state and Federal agenda than a response to local needs. Overall, the ESC concept is one title III innovation that has been institutionalized—a convenient, and perhaps necessary, vehicle for implementing a growing array of state and Federal mandates.

Getting on the Band Wagon: Maine Schools Discover the National Diffusion Network. The National Diffusion Network began in 1974 as a project funded under the U.S. Commissioner of Education's discretionary allotment of title III ESEA funds. In establishing the NDN, Office of Education staff reasoned that, rather than subsidizing the development of more

innovative programs, they should spend their money on getting some of the title III pilot projects already developed into use at the local school level throughout the Nation. The projects they wanted to disseminate were those that had received the seal of approval from the OE/NIE Joint Dissemination Review Panel and that were listed in the JDRP catalog, *Educational Programs That Work*.

The strategy devised for NDN was to put designated "change agents" into direct personal contact with local school personnel. Two categories of change agents were funded: developer/demonstrators, the original developers of exemplary title III projects now assigned to demonstrate them in other districts and train teachers in their implementation; and state facilitators, who would serve as "linkers," assisting local school staff in the assessment of their curricular needs and the choice of appropriate JDRP programs to meet them.

In Maine, a carefully lettered sign in the office of the state facilitator, Robert Shafto, gives the basic NDN sales pitch: "School Districts No Longer Have To Reinvent the Wheel, Wasting Valuable Time and Money, in the Process of Improving Their Curriculum." This message appears to make sense to the state's schools, where 65 percent of the districts have adopted at least one NDN program.

Shafto points with pride to the side effects of adopting elements of NDN: school districts beginning to budget for the first time a line item for teacher inservice training; superintendents becoming involved in curriculum discussions; and school staff learning to cooperate and work together as they go through an adoption. Like other state facilitators, Shafto spends most of his time in rural districts. The personalized nature of the improvement strategy, the circuit-rider mode of operation, and the low cost of the facilitator's service suggest that it might be an improvement strategy tailormade for rural schools.

NDN in Maine gets high marks from school administrators, who have the most frequent contact with the state facilitators. The "proven" programs, which result in higher test scores, provide superintendents with ammunition to fight the growing public demands for accountability. Teachers, on the other hand, who may be required to change what they do in adopting NDN programs, are less enthusiastic, particularly those who see the structure of the new programs as interfering with their own creativity.

It is difficult to sort out how much of the success of NDN in Maine is due to the strategy and how much to the very astute personalized operation of Robert Shafto. However, the fact that NDN provides access to new ideas and new practices, along with support for implementing those practices while leaving the decisions on what programs to implement with the local community, makes the strategy particularly suited for rural education.

Elk River, Idaho: Buying Quality in a "Company Town." Elk River, a logging community of 350 residents, is the scene of a quite different locally initiated improvement effort. Set deep in the woods behind a mountain, 20 miles from the nearest community, the town was literally built by the Potlatch Lumber Company as a base for its logging operations. It re-

mains a one-industry town today. The community maintains its own K-12 school of 87 students and is determined to save it from consolidation. Improvement efforts have focused on the struggle to win accreditation for the school, which was finally achieved in the 1978-79 school year.

The campaign against consolidation has united parents, school board members, teachers, and the superintendent. While it centers on the need to keep the school in the community, it has not been characterized by a community-oriented curriculum-development strategy. Instead, it has focused on making the school competitive with larger schools in the preparation of its students for "the real (outside) world." The chairman of the school board, a 49-year-old native of Elk River who has worked in the woods all his adult life, says, "I don't think any man should have to bust his back for a living. That's what a lot of us do. What's it get him? It's just like a miner doesn't want his boy to be a miner. A lumberjack doesn't want his boy to be a lumberjack. These people have worked hard all their lives. They don't think it's a way to go."

Curriculum improvement has concentrated on the development of a systematic, fully individualized approach to teaching traditional skills and content areas. The community has taxed itself beyond its legal obligation in order to be able to offer teachers one of the highest salary schedules in the state. The school also benefits from legislation for "necessarily existent" small schools, enacted when a former superintendent serving in the legislature wanted to ensure adequate financial support for a quality program in Elk River. The bill authorizes the state to pick up costs that cannot be covered by local tax effort for necessarily existent districts, and Elk River is the only school in the state so designated.

The school owns a 66-passenger bus, a station wagon, and a van, even though all students live within walking distance of the school and there is no busing. The vehicles are used for frequent field trips around the state to familiarize students with the outside world. The community supports the school thoroughly and measures its success by substantially higher-than-average student achievement scores and the successful adjustment of many of the students to college and other higher education institutions. However, Elk River offers a "quality" program at a quality price: over $4,300 per student.

Loblolly: Curriculum Enrichment in Gary, Texas. Gary, Texas, is a small town of just over 200 near the Louisiana border. It maintains its own K-12 school, with a total enrollment of about 200, drawn from the town and from the 59-square-mile surrounding district. The school program has been strictly conventional, reflecting the concerns of a conservative, tradition-minded community. Parents and other community members demonstrate their feeling for the school through their enthusiastic support of extracurricular activities, especially athletics.

Several years ago, Lincoln King, the high school social studies teacher, read *The Foxfire Book*, a collection of articles selected from a magazine written and published by a group of high school students and their teacher in northeastern Georgia, which chronicled the customs,

folklore, and crafts of their local area. He decided that this was an idea that could work in Gary, and asked permission from his administration to begin such a magazine in his freshman geography class.

The permission was granted, and King set out to persuade his students to give the idea a try. The students expressed a real uncertainty about the project. They were uncomfortable about interviewing adults. What questions should be asked? What would they do if the people interviewed did not want to talk? Their fears were unfounded. The interviews were developed into stories for a new magazine, *Loblolly*, named after the scrubby pine tree found throughout the area. Much to their surprise, the magazine sold out, an instant success.

There was some question on the part of the superintendent as to whether the project should be continued. Some spelling and grammatical errors had been missed before publication, causing some embarrassment, and he questioned the time spent on the project by both students and staff. However, after receiving commendations from the State Bicentennial Committee and the director of journalism for the University Interscholastic League, and with continued support from the community, *Loblolly* has become a designated extracurricular activity, alongside the yearbook and athletic activities. The question of whether or not a Loblolly activity is a better way to achieve the skills and knowledge expected from traditional courses has not been asked.

Strategies That Extend Beyond the System

The Urban/Rural Program: Can the Government Buy Change in Rural Schools? In 1968, Congress passed the Education Professions Development Act, a flexible piece of legislation that directed the Office of Education to remedy educational personnel shortages and to reform training for professionals in the field. Impressed by the activities of the community action agencies created by the Office of Economic Opportunity, Federal program designers were intrigued with the possibility of using community action to wrest some of the power over educational decisions from central school administrations and to put pressure on teacher training institutions to be more responsive to local community needs in their inservice programs.

Visits to I.S. 201 in Harlem, Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn, and the Adams-Morgan Community School in Washington, D.C., convinced Federal program officers that forming a program in which "school/community councils" had control of Federal monies for inservice teacher education would help establish parity among administrators, teachers, and community members in educational decisionmaking. Consistent with the broad purpose of ESEA, the new program was to serve poor minorities; since they existed in both the cities and small towns, the Urban/Rural (U/R) Program was created.

However, in Fort Gay, West Virginia (one U/R participant), the good guys and bad guys did not break down along administration-versus-community lines. Rather, as is characteristic

of West Virginia's politics, white hats or black hats are based on political faction or kinfolk relationships. U/R's giving $750,000 to a 23-member council did little to shift power, but rather provided another arena for factional differences to get played out, which they did for 5 years in weekly meetings of from 3- to 5-hours' duration.

In spite of good intentions by Urban/Rural to let local communities call the shots, inflexible time lines and bureaucratic expectations of what constituted an acceptable proposal forced Fort Gay to rely on a neighboring university for the program design. With the loss of local ownership, council members, who originally worked without pay, joined the majority of other U/R councils in paying themselves $10 a meeting. Further, according to the elementary principal, the inservice education programs were "too much of a teacher-oriented college degree program, without much effect on actual classroom behavior."

Other than a much higher percentage of master's degree teachers, the remaining impact most visible in Fort Gay is a U/R-financed, school-operated FM radio station. A planned end-of-program potluck dinner celebration did not materialize—word got out that there were no funds remaining to pay for attendance.

San Juan, Utah: Ending a White-Indian School Battle by the "Process" Method. The Rural Futures Development Program, sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), evolved from earlier programs concerned with expanding the limited curriculum of rural schools and accommodating the unique needs of Native Americans in the Northwest. NWREL wished to launch a more comprehensive approach to improving education in rural communities. Drawing on theories of how people learn and how organizations change, NWREL developed a process by which all segments of the rural community could participate in a problem-solving process around the issues of improving education. The Rural Futures Development Program was "...designed to aid rural people in creating their own solutions which will fulfill needs that are unique to their own environments."

The process called for the formation of school/community groups (SCGs) consisting of "opinion leaders" from all segments of the community. Assisting with the formation and operation of these groups was a "process facilitator," who was to provide training and assistance in the use of rational problem-solving procedures (i.e., building agendas, identifying needs, considering alternative solutions, and making recommendations), but who would remain neutral on the substance of the issues.

NWREL's search for a demonstration site for RFD coincided with the San Juan County, Utah, School District's needs to resolve a threatened lawsuit by a Native American legal action group on behalf of the Navajo Indians. The lawsuit charged that the Navajo children, who represented 50 percent of the school population, did not have equal access to educational opportunities because they had to travel long distances to public school or attend boarding schools.

School and community groups were formed, initially in the Indian communities in the southern half of the sprawling 7,799-square-mile district. Needs assessments were made in two languages, and recommendations were made to the board to build two new schools to serve the Indian students. The board accepted the recommendations on the condition that the necessary bond issue could be passed to finance the construction. The SCGs were instrumental in passing the bond issue, building up a sufficient majority in the southern end of the district to offset the lack of support in the northern end. The success of the SCGs in getting their agendas before the school board and implemented prompted the communities in other parts of the district to request help in forming school/community groups to look at issues of curriculum and teacher evaluation.

However, the SCG strategy appears to have had a major problem—keeping and funding "*neutral*" process facilitators. Even early in the implementation, Indian process facilitators tended to take an advocacy position on the side of Indian communities. Now that outside money is no longer available for such positions, the number of process facilitators has been reduced to one, who tends to identify more with the needs of the schools and central administration than with those of the community.

Facilitating New Leadership for Rural Education: The Leadership Development Program/Southern Appalachian Leadership Training. Convinced that rural-to-urban migration was siphoning off the emerging young leadership needed to solve the problems of rural education, The Ford Foundation launched the Leadership Development Program in 1966 to identify and help develop a new cadre of leadership from rural regions of the United States. The 10-year, $10-million program provided year-long fellowships to 700 individuals to pursue individually designed programs combining such activities as apprenticeships, travel, visits to model projects, work experience, independent study, research, and writing. Approximately 85 percent of the fellows have returned to their rural communities or regions to work. While many have returned to leadership positions in education, others have moved into electoral politics or other areas of service.

However, efforts to develop new leadership in groups outside the socioeconomic mainstream (i.e., traditional Native Americans and those living below the poverty line) have been largely unsuccessful. Even with special efforts to reach these populations, program activities and requirements for reporting are sufficiently foreign to the existing life style as to make the experience of questionable value.

A spin-off program, Southern Appalachian Leadership Training (SALT), also initially funded by The Ford Foundation, addressed many of the problems of the Leadership Development Program in serving poor minorities. Additional technical assistance, less travel, and more flexibility in the funding and length of fellowships have not only made the program more useful for developing leadership in Appalachia, but also have lowered the cost of the program sufficiently for it to be maintained after the end of Ford Foundation funding.

"Have You Considered Reorganization?": Iowa's People United for Rural Education (PURE). In 1977, the Iowa State Legislature, in cooperation with the Department

of Public Instruction, proposed legislation mandating the consolidation of school districts with enrollments of fewer than 300 students. In response to the threat, two farm women began to lobby against the consolidation bill based on their beliefs in the merits of small rural schools. They were soon joined by several other women and four educators, and an organization was formed with a name—People United for Rural Education (PURE)—and a purpose: "To promote the qualities that have been inherent in rural education and to pursue educational excellence that will enhance rural community life."

The organization has been basically a political-action group, building a network of parents, superintendents, and school board members representing small Iowa schools. They publish a monthly newsletter, which includes columns on educational problems in rural schools and ways of addressing them, as well as information on schooling costs and arguments for combatting consolidation proponents. Annual conferences draw speakers and experts in the field of rural education from across the country.

Thus far, the group has been able to forestall additional reorganization in Iowa, but strong feelings in favor of school consolidation still exist in the state legislature and the state education department. Some observers are convinced that PURE is simply postponing the inevitable. Further, whereas PURE for the moment has prevented passage of a mandatory consolidation bill, it has not succeeded in changing the spending limitations imposed by the school finance structure so as to take care of the increasing costs of keeping a small school in operation. For some of the smallest districts, then, consolidation is probably inevitable, and the most that PURE can hope for is that the local communities have a voice in how that consolidation takes place.

Blackey, Kentucky, and Liberty, West Virginia: Community School Movements and County Politics in Southern Appalachia. Speaking on behalf of a group called "The Committee for a School in Blackey," Geynell Begley, a former teacher, a mother, and a country storekeeper, wrote:

> We think it is important for our children to have a sense of the continuity of their lives as they flow from the lives of their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. If our children are moved to a large, consolidated school, we lose touch with them, and they lose touch with the community. They will become citizens of nowhere...we want to help make their education relevant to their lives in the community.

Good education, to Mrs. Begley and the other parents and teachers in her group, is education that affirms a child's membership in his or her community. They practiced that philosophy and were intent on improving the educational program at their little elementary school in Blackey, Kentucky, in ways consistent with that belief. Parent volunteers were used extensively in the school, and local people were hired to help in teaching community history. They intended to prove, Mrs. Begley said, "what a real community school can do in this modern age."

But one night the school burned to the ground. In the ensuing months, parents and teachers organized in working for the rebuilding of the school. But the state department of education was intent on sending the children to a consolidated school "down the road." A protracted struggle followed, with the parents steadfastly opposing the end of their local schooling. The county board of education outwardly remained sympathetic to the parents, until a group of parents revised their strategy and began to ask only for board support to maintain a community storefront school for the Blackey children—at which time the board support vanished. Soon after that, the parents abandoned their fight.

In Liberty, West Virginia, a group of parents also protested the closing of their community school through consolidation. It was the last straw for a community that had been suffering under an autocratic educational regime. A political movement was soon organized, with the goal of electing a new board of education in the county—one that would change superintendents and commit itself to community-based schooling.

After a carefully managed "scientific campaign" that determined how many kinfolk groupings would need to be persuaded to vote for a change, the reform slate was elected. Changes were not immediate, because the old board had given the superintendent a new 5-year contract, and a bond issue had to be passed to finance building improvements before community schools could be reopened. In due time, however, the goals of the new board were met. The county now has a more open school administration, and community schools are once again serving the more remote areas of the district.

Staples, Minnesota: Improving the Schools To Save the Town. Staples, Minnesota, is a town of 2,700 residents, with a K-12 district enrollment of over 1,500. The survival of the school has never been a question, but when the railroad that provided most of the jobs in the community began to lay off workers, concern ran high for the town's future.

Superintendent Duane Lund recalls that, at a meeting of community leaders to map out a strategy for the town's survival, everyone agreed that, "of all things we need to do if we are going to build a community, the number one thing is to have a strong school system. If we want to bring in new industry or new business or attract new people, we've got to be able to say we've got a number one school system."

Lund has taken it upon himself to build a reputation for the Staples school. His primary strategy has been to develop other leadership within his system. An important part of that effort has been the active pursuit of Federal grants to support innovative programming. Lund admits that the opportunities for professional staff development through the federally funded programs have been more significant than the programs themselves. Additionally, the publicity that the programs have brought the system fits precisely into the original goal of image-building for the community.

The expertise of the school grantsperson has been shared with the town; he writes proposals for municipal development grants, helps local businesspersons prepare SBA loan ap-

plications, and chairs the community development corporation. The community development theme has also characterized program improvements at the vocational school operated under the district. Community service projects have been used as opportunities for teaching heavy-equipment operation; students have built city parks, excavated airport runways, and prepared sites in the industrial park. Vocational programs in farm management have arisen in direct response to local needs, and the school's acclaimed machine-trades training program has enticed several machine tooling businesses to locate in Staples—a boost to the town's sagging economy.

The cooperative approach to school improvement/town survival did not emerge overnight. The story has unfolded over the last 25 years, largely owing to the efforts of Doc Reichelderfer, board chairperson for 30 years (who spent about as much time at school as in his medical practice), and the two superintendents who have held office during that period—P.M. Atwood, who retired in 1959 after a 39-year tenure, and his successor, Duane Lund, who still holds that position.

4. Interpreting the Montage: Rural America, Multiple Realities

As stated in section 1, we had two objectives in undertaking this study: first, we wanted to understand, as best we could, the nature of rural communities; and second, by looking at past rural school improvement efforts, we hoped to understand better how to improve rural education in the future. Our findings about rural communities are presented in this section, and an analysis of the rural school improvement strategies follows in section 5.

Perceptions of Rural America

Current perceptions about life in rural America vary considerably, and factual information about society outside the cities is limited. We know from Federal statistics that 54 million Americans live outside the designated urban areas of the country. Some 12,000 school districts, representing 75 percent of the Nation's operating school systems, serve the children of this population—approximately one-third of all our public school students.

Perhaps the most commonly held perspective of rural America is that, because of improved transportation and instant communication, it has become just a more sparsely populated version of urban America. Sociologists Friedman and Miller wrote in 1965, "...from a sociological and indeed economic standpoint, what is properly urban and properly rural can no longer be distinguished. The United States is becoming a thoroughly urbanized society, perhaps the first such society in history."[5] This view is consistent with the third theme of rural school improvement—that schooling is a generic endeavor—which also emerged in the mid-1960's.

To be sure, technological advances have affected rural areas as they have urban areas. But as Thomas Ford points out in *Rural U.S.A., Persistence and Change*,[6] the cultures were different to begin with. As a result, they have changed in different ways and at different rates, therefore continuing to exhibit very distinct characteristics. Our travels tend to confirm this position. We did indeed experience a number of different realities in rural America. For example, we visited rural communities that still might best be described by the title of a Presidential report from a dozen years ago as "The People Left Behind."[7] This perspective, as updated by Frank Fratoe,[8] sees rural Americans as still behind their urban counterparts in terms of wage levels, family income, adequate housing, and access to education and health care, and as served by school systems with relatively fewer support staff and services, less revenue, and lower per-pupil expenditures. Children in this rural America begin school later, progress more slowly, and attain fewer years of education than do urban and suburban children.

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Consider, for example, the communities of Mileston, Tchula, Lexington, Durant, Goodman, and Pickins in Mississippi. All are served by the Holmes County School District. All are also rural, poor, and predominantly black. Remnants of the civil rights movement still remain. In Lexington, for example, the United League (a black citizens group) organized an unsuccessful attempt to boycott white-owned businesses to get better jobs. League leader Arnett Lewis states, "They will hire you in the store to push a broom or mop, but they won't hire you to work the cash register."[9] While the sharecropper system has virtually disappeared, some 800 blacks in Holmes County still live on plantations, where for 3 months of the year they chop and pick cotton for minimum wage or less. During the other 9 months, they survive on the meager wages they have earned, government assistance checks, and any food they may have grown.

County schools were desegregated more than a decade ago, resulting in a "black"-controlled school system enrolling 99.5 percent black students. The 1,350 white students in the county attend five private academies. Although blacks run the schools, the economy, dominated by such operations as the 2,000-acre Egypt plantation, is firmly controlled by whites. The abandonment of the public schools by whites has eroded local financial support to the point where 40 percent of the operating budget comes from the Federal Government.

A second view of rural America is as a place where the good life can still be lived. Devil's Lake, North Dakota, is a farming community and trade center, one and one-half hours' drive west of Grand Forks. Located within the watershed of the Red River Valley, it includes some of the richest farmland in the country. Huge $60,000 tractors till the soil, equipped with air-conditioned cabs, stereo music, and two-way radios. Commercials on local TV stations show similar rigs driving off into the sunset, reminding third-generation farmers, who know the tales of eating dirt behind a team of horses, that a Monrow Plow can be folded up to meet the width requirements of the highway and headed home without the driver ever having to leave the comfort of the cab.

One observer has suggested that it is possible for some farmers with large spreads to work an average of 8 to 10 weeks out of the year—4 or 5 weeks to get the crops in the ground, and 4 or 5 weeks to harvest. With no cows to milk or chickens to feed—those necessities being supplied by the giant grocery chains—farmers' families are free to travel and enjoy the good things in life during the long, hard North Dakota winters.

Although some are poorer than others in Devil's Lake, poverty is not obvious. When found, it is likely to be at the home of a Native American family trying to make a living outside the nearby reservation. The political process is relatively open, and residents claim no one "owns" the area. The schools are new and well-kept, and they share the most modern equipment and progressive educational programs, largely because of the district's close ties to the university in Grand Forks. While educators complain of inevitable tight budgets, they acknowledge that discipline problems are manageable. Devil's Lake is a good place to live, its residents insist.

A third and rapidly growing view of rural America is as a place where city folks go to play, relax, and even "drop out," where one can escape the intensity, stress, and noise of the city, to fish, ski, boat, breathe some fresh air, and enjoy the scenery. With increasing frequency, urban dwellers are making the decision to choose a more relaxing life style on a small acreage or in a small rural village.

Wilmington, Vermont, in the Deerfield Valley of the Green Mountains, is one such place. Located in the heart of the southern Vermont ski country, Wilmington offers opportunity for small town life while still being close enough to the eastern metropolitan areas to provide a relatively easy transition for former urban residents. The impact of "city people" can be seen as one drives through the area. A-frames and mock Swiss chalets stand alongside fallen-down maple sugar huts and weathered clapboard houses. The influence of the "flatlanders" has been felt in the schools, where their demand for modern educational programs has provided years of controversy. A new open-plan school has been constructed north of Wilmington to accommodate the newcomers, and informal learning processes have largely replaced traditional programs.

James and Carolyn Robertson, who are part of this urban to rural movement, argue in *The Small Towns Book* that this renewed interest in small town living could lead to the extinction of rural culture.

> Lacking knowledge of its workings, we tend to regard it with indifference while we absorb its virtues. Like a less 'developed' society, it is largely passive. Unaware of our effect, we damn it for being backward and then for being corrupted...Continued migration of urban populations to rural communities will speed the process of suburbanization, for acculturation takes place in any instance in which new residents make demands on their new surroundings that require the establishment of services or facilities not demanded by previous residents and not indigenous to the prevailing occupational and social patterns.[10]

Characteristics of Rural American Communities

Although these examples in no way exhaust the diversity of rural America, they do raise questions about the wisdom of a common public policy for education regardless of location, and in fact suggest that policy should be differentiated not only along rural/urban lines, but in terms of local community differences as well. In the ideal world, one would tailor policy and practice to each community's uniqueness. However, recognizing the limitations of our imperfect system, there appears to be a compromise position concerning community types that, if adopted, could be most useful in improving rural education.

The communities involved in this study fall rather naturally into three categories.

Type of Community	Values	Socio-economic Factors	Political Structure/ Locus of Control	Priorities for Schools
Rural Poor	Traditional/ commonly held	Fairly homogeneous/low	Tends to be closed, concentrated/often lies outside local community	Mixed and low
Traditional Middle America	Traditional/ commonly held	Fairly homogeneous/middle income	Tends to be more open/ widely dispersed	High
Communities in Transition	Wide range presented	Wide range of low to high	Shifting from "oldtimers" to "newcomers"	Wide range, resulting in school being battleground

Communities in the first category, "Rural Poor," are, by almost any measure of the good life, well below the national average: lower income, lower level of educational development, higher mortality rate, and lower level of political power. Economic power and political power tend to be concentrated, and often lie outside the local community. The Holmes County and Fort Gay sites would tend to fit into this category.

The second category of rural communities that share a number of common characteristics can be labeled "Traditional Middle America." Midwest farm communities, while not wealthy in terms of millionaires, are well off in comparison to "rural poor" communities. Solid family life, well-kept homes, and a puritan work ethic assure a high level of achievement in both school and the workplace. Power structures are relatively open; political participation is broad-based. Resources, both money and people, are available for educational improvement. The majority of communities visited would fit into this grouping—the Iowa and North Dakota towns, as well as many of those served by NDN in Maine and ESC in Texas.

"Communities in Transition" represent the third identifiable category of rural America. Recreation, energy development, and proximity to urban areas (which allow commuters to enjoy the rural life) have resulted in an influx of outsiders who bring with them different ideas, different value systems, and new demands for services. Here, the social structure is in a state of flux, and conflict between the old and the new is almost always focused on the school, since it still serves as the hub of the small town social structure. The tight linkages that characterize social interactions in small communities serve to increase the intensity of those interactions when new ideas and new expectations generate conflict situations. Strong opinions, easily

held in an anonymous urban society, can create a lot of heat in the more personal climate of small towns. The communities served by Mountain Towns Teacher Center, the communities of the South Umpqua School District, and San Juan County, Utah, exhibit many of these characteristics.

There are obvious dangers in trying to force reality into a simplistic taxonomy such as this. In the real world, there are far too many variables and far too much complexity. We would, however, like to offer it as a step beyond a common set of policies, a common set of solutions for all educational problems, regardless of setting. This recognition of unique community characteristics, in fact, appears to be a critical factor in the following analysis of what worked and why.

5. Interpreting the Montage: What Worked and Why

Determining which school improvement efforts worked and which did not was, at best, an inexact exercise. Evaluation schemes had not been built into the programs we studied, so there were no objective measures such as teacher growth, organizational change, or student achievement that could be looked at to gauge program success. Lacking such concrete measures, our definition of what worked was limited to two more global indicators: the durability of a program over time, and its continuing contributions to its original objectives.

A number of the programs clearly had difficulty in meeting even these criteria. For instance, while participants of Urban/Rural and Teacher Corps acknowledged that courses offered in local communities and paid for by those projects made inservice training more attractive, they also agreed that the courses were not much different from regular university offerings. Urban/Rural ended when the last dollar was spent. And although a few of the Teacher Corps activities, such as the community outreach program, may survive for a while in Holmes County, both the formal inservice education effort and the internship program will cease now that the funding cycle is over. The activities of the Experimental Schools Program, many of which represented rather substantial change in the school program, began to meet with resistance even before the end of funding, and the growing backlash in the community dictated that the new administration "get things back to normal."

Other programs came much closer to meeting the criteria of durability and usefulness. The New School, now the Center for Teaching and Learning, continues to pursue the upgrading of North Dakota teachers 12 years after that program was begun. The specific strategy of recycling non-degreed teachers is no longer needed, and it has largely been replaced by a combined strategy of teachers centers and off-campus courses to supplement the on-campus programs. Loblolly and PURE, both locally funded, did not have to pass the test of surviving the cessation of outside funding. Both have continued, and PURE has expanded its purpose to look more broadly at improving rural schools in Iowa, in addition to protecting their continued existence. The Leadership Development Program has continued with a modified format as the Southern Appalachian Leadership Training Program. The ultimate test for NDN has not yet been faced since it still receives Federal funding. (Data are not available at this time to determine the success and continuation rates of the individual program adoptions.)

The varying degrees of success exhibited in the case studies led us to try different frameworks for identifying critical factors in rural school reform. This can be illustrated by examining the strategies in terms of the three themes of rural school reform outlined in section 2. The programs we studied led us to seriously question the validity of the first theme (the rural school is the problem) and the third (the problems of education are generic).

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In terms of the first theme, we must note that we saw many excellent schools in our travels, with dedicated, experienced teachers and administrators apparently doing a good job of providing basic education. It is also clear that the solutions derived from the first theme, such as consolidation and professionalization, have reached their limits in several ways. The stories of resistance to consolidation in Iowa and Appalachia suggest the existence of a different set of assumptions about what constitutes quality education. Local control and tight linkages to the community are perceived to be more important than the claimed efficiency and effectiveness of larger size. Rising transportation costs underscore the need for maintaining small schools in places like San Juan County and Elk River, with their sparse populations and difficult terrains. Similarly, upgrading rural schools by standard strategies such as staff development, while successful in North Dakota, encountered significant implementation problems in Vermont, Mississippi, and West Virginia. Finally, we suspect that the deficit model inherent in the first theme reduces the attractiveness of these strategies in most rural communities.

In terms of the third theme, we found a more mixed picture of success. The National Diffusion Network stands out as an example of a Federal strategy that works well in a rural state, although it was not designed particularly for rural areas. However, more generally, we found that Federal strategies such as Experimental Schools, Teacher Corps, and Urban/Rural led to stories of either inappropriate designs or problems with Federal administrative procedures in relation to the needs and dynamics of rural schools.

As indicated earlier, clear examples of the second theme ("necessarily existent" small schools) were not available for study. However, those reforms that were locally initiated, such as Loblolly, Staples, and Elk River, appear to have had relatively high success rates. But even here, not all were productive. Mountain Towns and Blackey revealed that local reformers may miscalculate in their assessment of needs or may lack the resources necessary to carry through with their plans. In addition, the locally initiated success stories generally involved some form of inspiration or support from outside sources. Staples was liberally supplied with Federal program funds, Elk River utilized consultants from the state education agency, and Loblolly received moral and political support through outside awards at several points.

Thus, none of the themes proved to offer a universal prescription for planning future efforts or even an explanation for the variances in success among the different strategies.

We also arrayed the case studies in other ways in the hope of finding some critical dimensions that explained success or failure. For example, one can cluster strategies based on their problem definition: staff development (NDN, New School, Urban/Rural, Teacher Corps, Mountain Towns); community involvement (Staples, RFD, PURE, Blackey/Liberty, Urban/Rural); or curriculum (NDN, Experimental Schools, Loblolly). Yet each grouping generally contains both winners and losers, and we did not sense one of these problems as existing across the board in all the sites observed. There were also varying degrees of success shown in strategies that concentrated on within-school variables, as opposed to efforts to influence rural education from a broader base. Finally, heavily funded efforts were not necessarily more successful than those operating on small local budgets. In fact, there seem to be more dangers in "overfunding" a small school project in terms of its durability.

So what *are* the critical elements for rural school improvement? Our analysis suggests that the factors are very much local-community-dependent and relate both to *what* is to be done and *how* the design is carried out.

Centrality of Problem Definition

The success of rural school improvement appears to relate directly to the centrality of the problem definition to both the school and the community. In those cases where a high consensus was achieved concerning the relevance and significance of objectives, projects continued and were useful; where the broad-based consensus was not achieved, projects ceased to operate when funding ran out. Successful project implementation requires the investment of extra time, effort, and energy. The most carefully designed policies and promising programs cannot fulfill their potential if those involved do not believe that a problem exists and that the proposed activities can address that problem. In other words, unless the locals are convinced it's worth doing, it won't work. And as in the general research on the process of change, we found that the level of local commitment and motivation is not an immutable given.

The discouraging policy conclusion that "some do and some don't and there's nothing you can do about it" is not warranted. Instead, consistent with more general research on innovation, we found that commitment and consensus can be generated in a local community. Conversely, we found that where they exist, they can also be depressed.

Rural communities, particularly those populated by poor minorities, have a multitude of difficult and often interrelated problems—low economic base, isolation, and low level of local leadership and expertise. Typically, the educational problem addressed by a change effort is simply symptomatic or a subset of more pervasive difficulties. Further, rural residents, particularly those living in poverty, have fewer personal resources—time, energy, and money—to devote to anything beyond providing food and shelter for their families. Individuals in such communities will invest these precious resources only when the problem addressed by a change effort is accorded high priority. Teacher Corps did not succeed in achieving that priority in Holmes County.

Even in more affluent rural communities, projects failed in part because there was little local consensus about the importance of the problem as defined at the national level. Consequently, commitment to project goals was not forthcoming. While all concerned may support efforts to achieve "better education," if they do not perceive anything seriously deficient in their present practices, they are unlikely to endorse a school reform program.

This does not mean that Federal policymakers or other outside planners must abandon their own goals and objectives and simply "put money on the stump" to effect change in rural school practices. What it does mean is that programs must offer a variety of methods and techniques within a broad conceptual framework that allows local decisionmakers to determine which educational needs have greatest priority in their communities and how these needs can best be addressed.

To cite several positive examples, the North Dakota project was useful and has continued because both parents and school people agreed with the legislature that schooling would be improved if all teachers were fully certified. RFD met with success in San Juan County, Utah, because both educators and residents of the county saw it as a useful strategy in resolving the problem of equal access to education. The Staples School Community Development effort addressed problems that were perceived to be critical to the survival of both the school and community. And both eventually benefited. The proposed legislation to close the small schools of Iowa threatened a way of life for a large segment of the state, and while PURE began as a parents' response to this threat, many small school administrators and teachers have since joined the effort.

Examination of the case studies suggests, then, that the success of rural school improvement programs depends on how well they fit local community needs, as well as local educational needs. This finding is not surprising given that rural communities tend to be tightknit, personal, integrated social structures. Schooling in rural America is still very much the community's business. While professionalization and specialization have severed most of the natural linkages connecting schools and communities in urban areas, the integrated nature of the rural school and community are such that what goes on in the school immediately impacts on the community. And likewise, any change in the community immediately impacts on the school. Some of the programs examined, then, gained their legitimacy by virtue of the appropriateness of the problems being addressed.

Process of Change

Compatible policy design and relevant objectives are necessary but not sufficient conditions for rural school improvement. The implementation strategies chosen must also be consistent with the facts of life in rural schools. Three key factors are important to consider in the rural school improvement process: (1) broad-based planning; (2) providing implementation assistance; and (3) building an institutional base.

Broad-Based Planning. One way to ensure the relevance of problems to be addressed by a rural school improvement effort and to mobilize incentives for change is broad-based planning. This means involving all important actors in defining and planning the effort—a notion central to the Rural Futures Development strategy.

Such a planning strategy serves a number of important functions in the change process. First and most obviously, involvement of all relevant parties, especially those who will be responsible for implementation, enhances participant commitment to an idea by bestowing a sense of ownership. Project goals and methods then become theirs—something they helped to articulate, rather than something imposed by a central administrator, project director, or outside agency.

But there is a second, very functional value of broad-based planning. Participants in different roles have varying perceptions not only of the problem, but also of effective solutions.

In a rural community, where the school's business is also the community's business, planners and advocates of change must enlarge their notion of the relevant actors to be involved in the planning process. In addition to school administrators and teachers, parents, school board members, local businesspersons, and other local leadership must be included as well. The Rural Futures Development Program required the involvement of all community opinion leaders as part of its design. Experimental Schools and Urban/Rural also called for extensive community participation in the design of local programs; however, in the final analysis, federally imposed timelines and expectations of how proposals and budgets should be constructed negated local community involvement.

Providing Implementation Assistance. Implementation assistance comprises the technical advice, consultation, and moral support provided project participants during implementation. In rural areas, as in urban sites, it is essential that such assistance be readily available, timely, relevant, and responsive to local concerns. Assistance that is scheduled in advance of particular project needs is likely to be out of phase with project activities and problems; problems rarely present themselves on a neat 6-month or bimonthly schedule. In the absence of timely and appropriate assistance, project efforts are likely to go awry and project morale may be irretrievably lost.

Rural participants are likely to have greater and more frequent need for technical assistance than their urban counterparts. Often, in the situation of a one-of-a-kind staff member, there is no one with whom to share ideas. Perhaps more importantly, many rural educators have lived too long with the idea that only urban and suburban teachers are capable of implementing new educational ideas. Consequently, rural participants not only need a greater amount of technical assistance to keep project implementation on course, they also require more in the way of hand-holding—support for their efforts and assurance that they are making adequate progress.

It is equally important to provide assistance in appropriate ways. Urban residents have grown comfortable with outside experts and have become sophisticated in using their skills on a short-term basis. Outside experts—or outsiders of any stripe—mean something very different to rural residents. Outsiders typically are seen as subscribing to alien political and personal codes. They are considered insensitive to the facts of rural life and unaware of how things happen in small communities. They are viewed as passersthrough, with no stake in community futures and no vested interest in the consequences of their proposals and activities. They are seen as wanting to do something *to* rural communities, not *with* them. Thus, outsiders often meet with suspicion and distrust in rural school improvement efforts.

The Leadership Development Program avoided this problem by providing the opportunity for local individuals to become the experts. Robert Shafto of the Maine National Diffusion Network worked hard at letting the small school educators know that he was one of them, delivering promptly the assistance requested by local districts.

Building an Institutional Base. Building an institutional base means ensuring that sufficient expertise and support remain in the community to sustain a change effort when outside

funding ends or when key project participants move on. A common mistake in both urban and rural change efforts is to assume that activities in support of project continuation can wait until the last funding check arrives.

Often, rural change efforts are initiated and controlled by individuals with only short tenure in the community. An important aspect of building an institutional base, then, is providing sufficient training to enable remaining personnel to continue project activities. Though problems of staff turnover plague urban and rural schools alike, they are more severe in rural communities. Rural school positions, for many educators, are either a first step in a professional career or an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and expertise. Planners and policymakers probably cannot do much to alter the high attrition characteristic of rural school staffs. What they can do, however, is to cast a wider net for project participants, giving special attention to including individuals who are committed to the community, in addition to the "movers and shakers" who are upwardly mobile.

Another aspect of building an institutional base that is also important to project continuation is the integration of project activities into ongoing routines. Change efforts that are "add-ons"—that do not require the displacement of budget items, personnel assignments, or normal operational procedures—are not likely to continue.

The high level of outside funding for Experimental Schools, Urban/Rural, Rural Futures Development, and the Leadership Development Program (in its original design) almost guaranteed that the programs would not continue. Small schools and small communities simply do not have sufficient financial resources. Even though the Mountain Towns Teacher Center was funded at a relatively low level, the services provided were never integrated into the ongoing routines of the districts served, and the program was therefore unable to continue.

In summary, all aspects of the rural school change process—appropriate local planning, providing implementation assistance, and building an institutional base—make interrelated and essential contributions to the outcome of a rural school improvement effort. If the first step in formulating effective rural education change policies is the design of strategies that reflect important differences between urban and rural communities and between the three general types of rural communities, the second step is the formulation of an implementation process that is consistent with the character and limitations of rural communities.

6. Accepting Rural Reality

Improving education in rural America involves a complex set of relationships between rural communities, the schools that serve those communities, and the larger educational establishment. The key to sorting out those relationships for rural school improvement is accepting rural reality—

- Accepting the fact that rural communities and schools are different from urban communities and schools.
- Accepting the fact that rural communities differ from each other and that interventions to improve rural education must recognize those differences.
- Accepting the fact that rural schools and rural communities operate as a single, integrated social structure.
- Accepting the fact that doing things to or for rural communities is inconsistent with rural tradition.

Accepting rural reality means moving from a generic public policy of school improvement to a more differentiated policy, one that allows and assists rural schools and rural communities to build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Accepting rural reality means creating public policy that values and accommodates rural cultures and rural schools, rather than trying to reshape those institutions into a likeness of larger schools and communities.

Redefining Rural School Problems

The first step in moving toward a more differentiated policy of rural school improvement is redefining the problems of rural education. This redefinition will require a shift in both *who* defines the problems and by *what* criteria.

Historically, the problems of rural education largely have been defined by the leaders of an urbanized education profession, who believe that if a rural school cannot get bigger, it cannot get better. We are not saying that central agencies should have *no* role to play in defining rural education problems. But the locus of control for making rural education decisions must be returned to the community, with outside agencies playing a facilitating rather than a dictating role. We also believe that the criteria for deciding if a problem is, in fact, a problem must be firmly rooted in local community conditions rather than in preconceived standards that are uniformly applied to all school systems, regardless of size and location.

Efforts must be made to train individuals who work in education agencies—whether Federal or state agencies, intermediate service units, regional labs, or institutions of higher education—to assist local schools and local communities in identifying and articulating their problems to truly reflect local community conditions, rather than shaping the problems to respond to the categories of a formal needs assessment instrument. Because the nature of rural culture tends to hold outsiders suspect, establishing a relationship that will allow this process to occur will take time, diplomacy, and patience. However, if rural education is to be improved, it will be because rural education and rural communities define their problems in ways that make sense to them, not because a state or Federal agency defines them for them.

Reexamining the Interface Between Rural Schools/Rural Communities and the Public School System

Redefining from a local perspective the problems to be addressed by school improvement efforts is a necessary first step in accepting rural reality. A second step involves a reexamination of those forces through which the larger public school system has shaped rural education into a likeness of larger schools. These forces include:

- School law, accreditation standards, and guidelines of mandated state and Federal programs.
- Staff training for both teachers and administrators.
- Curriculum and instructional materials.
- School finance formulas.
- Service delivery systems.

Addressing educational problems from the perspective of rural reality immediately confronts these policy constraints. For instance, a major complaint of rural school people involves the ever-increasing number of state and Federal program mandates that must be carried out by a small and overcommitted rural staff. Guidelines and accountability procedures designed primarily for larger systems not only cause an excessive amount of work, but in some cases, according to rural school administrators, simply do not fit the reality of their schools and their communities. Are there inherent in the homogeneous, tightknit, and personal social structure of rural communities conditions that make a different interpretation and implementation of some of these mandates more appropriate? This reexamination will need to be made at both the state and national levels by people who understand and identify with the concerns of rural communities. Determining the appropriateness of policy for rural communities and rural schools is not a simple issue. The rightness or wrongness of policy is as often determined by value positions as by factual data and rational arguments.

School consolidation, for instance, while meeting the test of rational arguments for "efficiency and effectiveness" as defined by those who view centralization as good, makes little sense to those who value rural communities and define efficient and effective education in terms of close community ties and maximum student participation in school activities. Analyz-

ing and redressing the balance of educational policy to be more favorable to rural communities will require the establishment of advocacy procedures to get the issues into public discussion and create the necessary political support.

Training programs for both teachers and administrators have long reflected an urban bias. Not only are the programs designed to prepare individuals for the specialized positions of larger schools, but students are told, both directly and indirectly, that teaching in a small rural school is to be viewed as a training ground for moving into an urban area, where the real opportunities lie. Schools of education that include a rural experience in their training programs are rare, and where they exist, they are likely to train teachers to cope as best they can with a system suited for larger schools instead of seeking a pedagogy and a curriculum more in tune with rural reality.

While many states have incorporated size and sparsity factors in school finance formulas, rising transportation costs and the increasing success of legal challenges suggest that such formulas are not adequately providing equal access to education. A related, unanswered question is just how equal access to education is defined. Certainly, accepting rural reality would not mean that the same education program offered in urban areas should be provided in rural communities, for the situations are different and therefore so are the needs.

The general lack of responsiveness of service delivery systems to rural education problems is due, at least in part, to the lack of good information about the nature of rural communities and rural schools. It is due also to the fact that rural education issues have not been clearly articulated and placed before education service agencies. Lacking this incentive, service agency personnel respond to pressures and problem definitions imposed from above. As progress is made on redefining rural school problems, opportunities for service agencies to serve rural schools in a more appropriate way should be improved.

One additional step could be taken that would go far in improving the responsiveness of service agencies to rural schools. That would be to include in the state school finance formula additional increments for small schools to purchase services not available in the local community. Giving rural schools the buying power to shop for needed services would encourage service agencies to respond to client needs, instead of offering programs that they or some other agency feels the local school requires.

Creating a Development Capacity

Redefining rural education problems and removing the policy barriers that stand in the way of accepting rural reality would go far in establishing the conditions for rural school improvement. However, the capacity to develop suitable programs for rural education is virtually nonexistent, but not because the people are wanting. Creative people can be found in small as well as large schools. Large schools do, however, have greater flexibility to free people for developmental work, and funding agencies are more inclined to fund large schools because processing a few large grants is easier than administering a large number of small grants. Rural schools are therefore forced into being consumers of urban-developed programs.

Further, textbook companies and other curriculum development producers have ignored the needs of rural schools because the numbers involved are so small as to limit profitability. The widely accepted assumption is that, since education is a generic endeavor, rural schools are just smaller versions of large schools and the curriculum therefore should be the same.

Central to any school improvement program is leadership development—creating within those involved the new perspectives, new skills, and understandings that will allow a program to move forward. The leadership development programs reviewed in this study in which participants worked on real problems, visiting and working along with others in similar situations, proved to be effective in developing the human resources needed to bring about educational change. Critical to such a strategy is a little money to buy the participants' time to develop their capabilities, coupled with sensitive program leadership to help participants think about the problems they wish to address and point them in the direction of other individuals and programs that can be helpful.

A companion strategy to freeing people from day-to-day routines for personal and/or program development is to bring new ideas and assistance to small rural schools on a regular basis. We have noted earlier that *how* these ideas and assistance are brought is as important as the substance of the ideas and assistance. Timing is very important; help is needed when it's needed, not before or after. The establishment of a basic level of trust between those bringing the assistance and those receiving the assistance is also essential.

Care must be taken in whatever strategies are implemented to be sure that they contribute to local capacity-building, and *not* to dependency on central education agencies, for it is at the local school level that more suitable education programs for rural communities need to emerge.

Developing Alternative Models

Small size, low population density, and the nature of the rural social structure do not fit with a concept of schooling that requires large numbers of students for efficiency and operates in a mode of specialization more suited to urban society.

In the first theme of rural school improvement efforts (the rural school itself is the problem), we saw the deliberate efforts of school reformers to give structure and organization to what was considered to be a haphazard process of education. In accepting rural reality, it becomes necessary to take a critical look at the present organization and conduct of schooling to see if changes need to be made to achieve a better fit between the process of education and rural communities. We are not suggesting going back to the one-room school. What is needed are some new models, an "intermediate technology" of education that falls somewhere between the country school of days past and the urban-style school that has taken its place. Just what such a school would look like and how it would operate in different types of rural communities is difficult to imagine. All of us, educators, parents, and community people, have for so long seen schooling in only one way that rethinking and developing alternatives for rural communities will be a long and arduous task.

However, in our visits we were impressed that the small scale of rural schools has several potential strengths to build on.

- Classes are smaller, and instruction is more individualized.
- Teachers know their students as individuals and often know their family backgrounds, thus ensuring a better fit between instructional program and student. (This can also have a negative effect if a child comes from a "bad" family and is not given a chance to succeed on his or her own merits.)
- Each student in a rural school serves an important function in the ongoing life of the school, and has a much greater chance for participating in all aspects of the educational program.
- Teachers have a sense of control over what and how they teach.
- There is more room for flexibility, enabling the school to capitalize on the strengths of individual teachers.
- Administrators and teachers are on the same side, with conditions of employment still being a fairly minor concern in terms of total energy expended.
- School board members are known as individuals, providing the opportunity for broad participation in policy formulation.
- A minimum amount of bureaucratic structure allows a higher percentage of financial and personal resources to be devoted to the instructional process and a smaller percentage to systems maintenance. Since "time on task" is one of the major factors in effective teaching, small schools have the potential for being even more efficient than large schools.

If small schools use their flexibility and their ready access to the world outside the classroom door, learning can be substantially more powerful than it can be with just textbooks. Studying history and learning to write by interviewing and by capturing information from the memories of senior citizens can make two traditionally dreary subjects come alive. Learning concepts of government by observing and participating in town meetings or sessions of the county commissioners can give real meaning to a civics course. Easily accessibility to the rural setting provides a living laboratory for the study of biology. Lumbering and mining activities offer practical problems in balancing the need for resources with preservation of the environment. (We have adopted a strange perspective when we see such reality as enrichment, rather than as a basic approach of learning.) Urban schools are forced to simulate such experience through textbooks and other learning aids; rural schools need not do this.

Technology has long been heralded as a means for expanding and enriching the curriculum of small rural schools. Educational television, videodisc, satellite, cable, amplified telephone, and computer-based instruction all promise to bring high-quality instruction to students, regardless of where they live. For various reasons—inadequate programming, insufficient teacher training, poor equipment, and unwillingness of teachers to change behavior patterns—such promise has not yet been widely realized. Further study is needed to determine why efforts to use technology have not met with greater success. It may be that the impersonal

quality of technological instruction simply does not fit what has traditionally been the human enterprise of rural schooling.

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These recommendations put much of the responsibility for moving ahead on those working in rural education and those who live in rural communities. This is as it must be. A lesson that comes through exceedingly clear from the case studies is that planning done *for* rural people does not lead to successful implementation. It denies them the will and capacity to undertake action on their own behalf. It is out of step with rural traditions. However, they cannot do it alone. Local people and rural educators must be linked with knowledgeable professionals in relationships of mutual trust and commitment. This implies the involvement of professional experts with local people over the long term and at each step of the development process.

Accepting the reality of rural America opens an array of possibilities not previously available. It opens the possibility that rural education might just look and operate differently. It opens the possibility that inherent in size and sparsity are reasons for school finance formulas to provide more money for rural education. It opens the possibility for professionals to work in rural education at all levels—development and service provision, as well as teaching and administration—without having to move to the cities to "get to the top" of the education career ladder. And it opens the possibility that rural children can receive a quality education designed specifically for their needs rather than a second-rate program defined by urban standards.

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After a short stay back in the public schools as an ESEA title III director, Nachtigal took what was to be a 10-year assignment with The Ford Foundation. His responsibilities included monitoring 25 projects that constituted the $30 million Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP) and serving as a regional representative for the Leadership Development Program, a program of fellowships to assist in developing rural education and rural community leadership. At the termination of CSIP funding, Nachtigal was asked to head a team of consultants to assess the impact of the $30 million investment. *A Foundation Goes to School* is the report of this program.

Upon leaving The Ford Foundation, Nachtigal took a 2-year assignment with the Denver-based Education Commission of the States to conduct the study of rural school improvement efforts reported in this monograph. He is now with the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory in Denver, Colorado, directing its Rural Education Component. The activities of this component are designed to: (1) further clarify those characteristics of rural communities and rural schools that are important to small school improvement; (2) develop policy and practice alternatives for small schools that are more in tune with rural reality; (3) keep important rural education issues before the public; and (4) test alternative approaches to rural schooling that will provide quality education in a time of declining enrollments and increasing costs.